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ABSTRACT

The Executive Secretary of the Commission on Non-Traditional Study discusses the history of the Commission and his own views on non-traditional study. The total system of postsecondary education in this country needs to be enriched by alternative modes of access, learning, and recognition. External degrees, contract learning, and similar developments are steps in this direction. New non-traditional programs have several features in common: a different student population; sensitivity to the individual student's needs; adaptation of learning to the student's circumstances; increased institutional flexibility; and expanded learning resources. Non-traditional studies must be placed in the context of other changes in postsecondary education: democratization, technology, and increased awareness of the problems of survival. (CS)

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Summer Institute on Non-Traditional Educational Programs

Bloomfield College
Bloomfield, New Jersey
August 14, 1972

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SO THAT PEOPLE WILL NOT PERISH FOR WANT OF KNOWLEDGE

Talk by John A. Valentine, Executive Secretary, Commission on Non-Traditional Study, at Summer Institute on Non-Traditional Educational Programs, Bloomfield College, August 14, 1972

At one point in the movie version of Catch 22, the General arrives at a bomber base to award medals to some of the flyers stationed there. When Major Yossarian steps forward, naked from head to toe, to receive his medal, the General can only manage to say, "You are a very weird person, Yossarian." Please take it as no offense if I say to you this morning that "you are a very weird group." You may all be decently clothed, but this does not hide the fact you are a strange mixture: two part professors, one part administrators, one part students - four year and two year colleges; public and private colleges. How does President Allshouse know this mixture will work? Is he even sure it is safe? Will you be able to reason together, or will the shocks of current crossing gaps of age, attitudes, and ancient enmities be too much for you?

I hope you do make a go of it, because it may well take such a mixture to do justice to the question of what to make of the non-traditional, or weird, ventures in higher education underway these days, or under consideration. I am ready to believe there is sound method in the madness of those planning this institute.

Open universities, colleges without walls, external degrees, contract learning - these and other terms have been recruited or

invented as labels for a host of alternative educational arrangements representing new ways of doing business, at least for those doing the business. I take it you will be examining some of these alternative possibilities in the next two weeks - sharing experiences with them or ideas about them, and judging their applicability to your own institutions. I expect you are all in for a stimulating experience.

My role is to provide you with an overview of non-traditional study. I shall do this to the best of my ability. My major qualification is my association the past year and a half with the Commission on Non-Traditional Study. Most of what I have to say is based on my experiences gained through this association. I shall not be reporting the official, final views of the Commission, however; these in fact will not be available until sometime during the coming winter. Instead I shall be conveying my own personal and strictly unofficial views, based on the same enormous mass of information and ideas so far considered by the Commission, but inevitably influenced by and limited by biases and limitations.

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It would not surprise me if some of you are thinking there is something a little weird about a Commission on Non-Traditional Study, or if you are wondering, in any case, "Just who is this Commission, and what is it up to?" The Commission is sponsored both by the College Entrance Examination Board and Educational Testing Service. It is supported financially by the Carnegie Corporation.

It is appointed to examine and make recommendations regarding the possibilities for non-traditional study in this country at the post-secondary level, including external degree possibilities. Samuel B. Gould, former Chancellor of the State University of New York and currently President of the Institute for Educational Development and Vice President of ETS, is the chairman. The other 25 members come from the worlds of higher education, educational research, government, labor and business. They were selected primarily as individuals known to be broad-gauged and creative.

The Commission met for the first time in March of last year. It has since met as a whole group three more times. These have largely been closed, working sessions, in the course of which information has been assimilated, major issues sorted out and clarified, and a series of recommendations gradually formulated. At the third meeting, in Washington, last November, open sessions were held, to which representatives of the many educational organizations and agencies based in Washington were invited.

In between these meetings of the full Commission, there have been a series of smaller meetings, bringing together a half dozen or so of the Commission members with representatives of various kinds of educational institutions. These meetings have put the Commission in touch with accrediting agencies, private colleges, state colleges and universities, community colleges, and some of the so-called alternative sponsors of post-secondary education, such as the government, industry, labor, proprietary schools and libraries.

President Allshouse and President Potter were among those participating in the meeting with representatives of private colleges.

The Commission has sought and responded to other opportunities to collaborate and communicate with others. Mr. Gould and fellow Commission members have conferred with a number of individuals and groups engaged in the study, planning or operation of non-traditional activities. They have also spoken about the work of the Commission at many educational meetings and conferences.

The Commission has so far issued two publications: New Dimensions for the Learner, and Explorations in Non-Traditional Study. A third publication is nearing completion on the external degree - its history, various forms, philosophical basis, and strengths and weaknesses. It should be out in the fall. The final report of the Commission is now in the agonizing stage of outlining and drafting.

Through its Research Committee, the Commission initiated this past spring a large-scale program designed to fill many gaps in available information about aspects of non-traditional study, including what it is that people in this country most want to learn, and what institutions across the country are doing and planning by way of non-traditional approaches. This program of data-gathering at the national level is being carried out by several research agencies under the over-all direction of Educational Testing Service, and with foundation support. It is planned to include some of the early findings in the final Commission report, to document its conclusions and recommendations.

Following publication of its final report, the Commission plans to sponsor, early next year, an invitational conference designed to stimulate others to consider and act on its recommendations.

The Commission then will disband. There is reason to suppose it has already had some catalytic effects. Its full impact, large or small, significant or insignificant, must await the passage of time and events.

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Three aspects of the Commission's work over the past 18 months stand out in my mind as particularly noteworthy. The first aspect, intrinsic to the nature of its task, is its frame of reference. Its mission has at times been described as "achieving a national perspective, in the public interest." These words roll off the tongue easily enough, but I have found they pose an awesome challenge. The Commission was encouraged by the College Board, ETS, and Carnegie to think and act independently, so there was no escaping the challenge of reaching for a broad view that would encompass the interests of all parties. It seems much more natural to operate from a base of personal, group, or institutional interests. It is not only difficult to step away from such a base, but difficult to know in which direction to step, and where to take one's stand. I have sensed this difficulty in members of the Commission, and certainly in myself. I will report only this: that when it has come to the crunch of regarding students as essentially there to serve the interests of institutions, or institutions as essentially there to serve the interests of students, the thrust has been toward the latter view.

The second aspect is the extraordinary surge in non-traditional developments from the time the Commission was appointed. The Commission was like the reporter who went out to investigate a minor border dispute and found himself covering a major invasion!

Back in the winter of 1970-71 attention was swirling around the Open University in Great Britain, just getting underway with its first 24,000 students, and in this country, around plans announced for an external Regents Degree, based on examinations, and Empire State College in New York. There was word of a few other developments in the wind or in the works, notably the University Without Walls project, but the scene was generally a quiet one nationally - a low profile, so to speak.

Then the fireworks began. One state after another began saying or doing things about open universities, external degrees, or variations thereof. California, Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington - these and other states moved forward with studies of or plans for alternative learning and degree-granting arrangements. Empire State College, Evergreen State College (in the state of Washington), Minnesota Metropolitan State College, and the 20 colleges participating in University Without Walls admitted their first students. On the campuses of many colleges and universities, modifications of long-standing practices were proposed, debated, publicized and, on some campuses, implemented. Occasions for exchanging of ideas about such modifications

were created at conventions and conferences all over the land. Speeches were made; articles were written. Change Magazine increased its circulation. Publishers signed up authors to write books on who in higher education was doing what to change things. The Commission found itself caught up in more than it had bargained for.

The third noteworthy aspect of the Commission's experiences relates to the scope and nature of non-traditional study. As in most periods of rising enthusiasm for new approaches, the cry went up in many quarters during the past year and half, "It is not all that new - we've been doing it for years!" And the cry in many instances was valid. Oklahoma, Syracuse, Goddard, Roosevelt University, the University of South Florida, could say with justification that they had been offering special degree programs to adults before all this fuss about open universities and external degrees. Evening courses, correspondence courses, television courses for adults were nothing new at many universities. The practice of alternating periods of study and periods of off-campus work was old hat at Antioch, University of Cincinnati, Northeastern, and many other institutions. Three-year baccalaurate degrees, suddenly fashionable, were offered by the University of Chicago, in the 1930's. They had been traditional for years in Great Britain and Europe. Speaking of Britain, wasn't the individualized contract learning approach really a variation of the tutor-student relationship at Oxford? And wasn't it true that the University of London had been offering degrees to external students on the basis of examinations for over a hundred years?

It became clear that "non-traditional" study does not necessarily refer to forms of study that are new, or, for that matter, to forms that are not traditional. "Traditional" turned out to be a very slippery term. Practices viewed as traditional at a young community college can seem non-traditional to the inmates of a four-year college or university.

The Commission was apparently stuck with a name that hinted only vaguely at what and how much it was expected to investigate. There was no authoritative definition of non-traditional study to fall back upon. For some reason, this has never seemed to distrub members of the Commission, and they have not felt it necessary or important to define precisely for themselves what the term "non-traditional" includes and excludes. I think the reason is that they shared from the beginning a sense that many people in our society, college-age and older, lack opportunities to learn what they want to learn, and need to learn, and are capable of learning, and that other people lack opportunities they deserve to gain recognition for knowledge and skills they have acquired outside of the framework of college courses, credits, and degree requirements.

I think they perceived that if these people were to have these opportunities, now denied them, the total system of post-secondary education in this country needed to be enriched, invigorated by an abundance and diversity of alternative modes of access, learning, and recognition. I believe they saw the steps being taken to institute external degrees, colleges without walls, contract learning, and other forms, by other names, as steps in this direction. Whether

These were called non-traditional or by some other name was of little consequence; the important thing was to examine their strengths and weaknesses so as to support and nurture their wholesome and full development.

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There is an extraordinary variety of recent developments labeled as non-traditional. Some features, however, seem to be common to all or most of them.

For one thing, they tend to reach out to people either not served at all or not served well by available educational arrangements. This includes older adults with jobs and family responsibilities. Open University in Great Britain admits students 21 and older - the idea is to give persons who missed out on university education a second chance to acquire it. Empire State, Minnesota Metro, and colleges participating in University Without Walls do not turn the tables quite so blatantly and refreshingly on the over-catered-to 18 to 20 year olds, but they, too, open wide the doors for the middle-aged.

A second characteristic is equal concern for all enrolled students, regardless of their ages and circumstances. There is as much sensitivity to the needs of older students, for example, as there is to the needs of younger, college-age students. The student who is 30 is not asked to play a role and follow practices established for students who are 20 - the role he does play is billed just as prominently and funded just as generously as the roles of all other students, younger and older.

Related to this equality of concern, and evolving from it, is an effort in some significant sense to adapt the learning arrangements to the particular circumstances of each student. The Open University arranges things so that each student can continue to live at home and hold down a job. Empire State College does this, and goes a step further by arranging a special program of learning for each student. The Regents Degree program permits a person to earn a degree by demonstrating he knows as much as college graduates do, regardless of the particular way he acquired his knowledge.

Efforts to adjust institutional arrangements to fit the singular circumstances of individual students produce an emphasis on flexibility, and this is another common characteristic of emerging programs and proposals. Flexibility in regard to where learning occurs, what it consists of, how it comes about, how much time it requires, how it is evaluated and recognized - any one program is not likely to achieve all of these kinds of flexibility, but it is likely to emphasize some of them.

Use of an expanded set of learning resources is still another characteristic. Not just the classroom or the campus, but the community and world that lie beyond the walls. Not just the professor with his specialized academic knowledge, but people competent in many significant areas of life who are able and willing to teach what they know, and what they know how to do. Not just books and talking faces (like mine right now), but visual and auditory media, telephonic hook-ups, programmed instructional materials, field trips, travel, apprenticeships, jobs, major creative projects, and a rich

variety of group living and working arrangements.

And with all of these features there is another conspicuous feature: problems and headaches galore. Problems of how to make the new arrangements work right; how to select or develop students capable of rising to the demands of self-initiated study; how to find or develop facutly members with the requisite repertoire of advising, teaching and student assessment skills; how to gain access to off-campus learning resources; how to pay and charge for it all; how to gain public acceptance and confidence; how to demonstrate the quality of the enterprise.

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The problems are so formidable, and the commitment it takes to overcome them so extraordinary (this commitment in fact is another characteristic of the programs), that "why bother?", "why rock the boat?" are reasonable questions. Like most such questions, the answers can vary considerably, and can be at surface levels or deeper levels.

At the surface level, the answer can be "because the governor directs that we move in this direction." For governor, one can substitute the legislature, the chancellor, the trustees, the president, or the dean. Or, it can be "because the budget has been cut", "enrollments are falling off", "the students are acting up again with new demands", or 'we better get on what seems to be a bandwagon". These can be honest and accurate answers.

There is another level of answers, however, that takes us into the deeper waters of history, and the current predicament of man and society. I hesitate to move into these waters, because they are mysterious and treacherous even for those most expert in studying them, and I am not an expert. At the same time, I have become increasingly convinced that each of us engaged in trying to understand or implement some particular non-traditional form of education must struggle to position whatever that form happens to be in as large and informed a perspective as possible. Otherwise, we are all too likely to find ourselves stirring up seven new devils while banishing one devil. We are engaged in very tricky business when we try to alter established patterns of personal and institutional behavior, and we better know in a large sense what we are about. Traditions may offend some of us deeply, but they are strong, massive and complex, with very deep roots.

I shall plunge into these deeper waters, therefore, because that is where I feel we must learn to swim, and I take you with me this morning not just for the ride, but to save me if I show signs of drowning.

I have come to see three large forces producing the winds of change now blowing through post-secondary education. The first is democratization. The second is technology. The third is human survival.

Democratization. In my own life I have observed what I believe to be evidence of a gradual expansion of democratic values, attitudes and practices into larger segments of the human population, and

wider areas of institutional life. As a child, I had less voice in family decisions than my children have. As a student in school and college, I had fewer rights than the students I taught during the 1950's at Middlebury College. As an enlisted man in the Air Corps in World War II, I lacked prerogatives now granted to enlisted men. As an employee and supervisor in several organizations, I have experienced the gradual implementation of more democratic personnel practices.

It seems true to me, and I gather to most historians, that through the past centuries and years, democratic values have steadily permeated the lives of more people, in most parts of the world. In recent years, to take a few random examples, we have seen this occur in the Vatican Council, in the Civil Rights Movement, and, most recently, in the various liberation movements. It has been visible on the political scene, and certainly on many college campuses.

As persons, young and old, from many backgrounds, sense more keenly their personal dignity, worth and possibilities, pressure will continue to build, I believe, for educational arrangements adapted to their singular needs and circumstances - pressures therefore for an abundance of diverse and flexible arrangements.

Science and Technology. For better or worse, man has used the knowledge gained through the sciences to produce a truly new kind of world, filled with vast new possibilities for life and death, health and sickness, pleasure and pain, fulfillment and despair. One thinks of James Thurber saying, "The world is so full of a number of things, we should all now be happy as kings," and then catching us up by adding, "and you know how happy kings are." In any case, we live today in a world quite obviously and profoundly filled with and influenced

by applications and products of technology. For our purposes this morning, I think there are several concomitants of our technological society that deserve special attention.

One is population. In this country at least we are apparently moving in the direction of a lower birth rate and a longer average life span, both made possible by science and technology. The consequence as time goes by will be a larger proportion of older people and a smaller proportion of younger people.

Another is the rate of social change, in just about all aspects of life, including the nature and distribution of occupations. The indications are that jobs and their demands are changing and shifting around faster than ever before; that people are moving more often - into different jobs, and different sets of circumstances.

A third concomitant is the knowledge explosion. The vast increase in knowledge generated in recent years is certainly related to advances in science and technology. A technological society creates new demands for knowldege, places new values on it, and provides new means for achieving it, outside of school as well as in school. It causes knowledge acquired when 20 to become obsolescent by the time one is 40, or 30, or even 25. It places a premium on knowing how to learn, and how to keep on learning. We have been described as an information rich, experience-poor society. In unburdening us from chores and activities that once taxed the time, energy, and ingenuity of our parents and grandparents, technology has freed us in some ways but impoverished us in other ways. It is no wonder the young today seem to hunger for experiences of making things, doing different things, going other places.

Lastly, of course, is educational technology, in all its ramifications - radio, T.V., cable T.V., audio cassettes, audio visual cassettes, telephone hook ups, and learning machines.

The Survival Crisis. I expect I share with most of you the experience of being a Johnny-come-lately when it comes to grasping the full meaning and significance of the environmental crisis, the urban crisis, the danger of nuclear war, the dangerous persistent gaps between poor and rich, the incapacity of major institutions to respond to pressing needs. My most recent effort to understand our current dilemmas was given to reading The Closing Circle by Barry Commoner. I wonder if you have the sense I have, deep down, of being in a state of shock as the enormity and reality of the threats to humanity sink in. This is one area where I find it extremely difficult to put myself in the shoes of young adults and children. Although I have experienced various forms of insecurity, through most of my life there has been the basic, solid sense that the physical environment would continue to be wholesome, and our nation fully capable of solving its domestic and foreign problems in a truly civilized way. I do not know what it would be like to grow up without that sense. These crises place a new premium on knowledge, and on the effective communication of knowledge.

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There has been an extraordinary growth of higher education in this country. For a hundred years, enrollments have doubled every 15 years or so. It is not surprising that the preoccupation with building more spaces for more college students has deflected attention

from signs that the framework for theses spaces was ceasing to be functional for many students and for society. Long established customs in regard to admission, curriculum, teaching, schedules, and degree requirements, were blocking the efforts of many people to learn, instead of fostering and facilitating these efforts. What many students were learning was not what they most needed and wanted to learn.

Many centuries ago, the prophet Hosea expressed what he felt was God's cry of anguish, "My people perish for want of knowledge." In seeking at this institute for more effective ways of bringing about in your students the learning that will be of most value and service to them, you will be helping to create the abundance and diversity of opportunity to learn that our world needs.

I wish you well.

JOHN A. VALENTINE
Executive Secretary
August 14, 1972